

Extract from “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace” by LRA

The Importance of the Bystander Approach and Training

The active bystander approach is a promising approach to tackle all forms of harassment or violence. It encourages people to take ownership of a problem and speak up when they witness potentially dangerous situations ranging from off-colour jokes among work colleagues or friends, to street harassment or harassment on public transport.

The principle aim of the bystander approach is to create a positive culture, wherever it is implemented, where violence, abuse and/or harassment are recognised and viewed as unacceptable.

There are many different types of active bystander programmes which have been applied across sectors including schools, universities, workplaces, sports clubs, police, the military, youth and community sectors.

There is strong evidence that active bystander programmes increase participants likelihood of intervening and calling out poor behaviours. They have also been shown to deliver changes in attitudes, beliefs, social and cultural norms and peer group relationships that may affect conditions of perpetration and victimisation.

Active bystander training is empowering for people who participate in it and equips them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to make safe and intervene in response to harmful behaviours and attitudes. It also provides a way to ensure that people have correct information and appropriate language to recognise and discuss safe and healthy relationships and unsafe behaviour.

What is the ‘Active Bystander’ Approach?

Essentially, there are four stages to move through to become an active bystander and make an intervention when witnessing harmful behaviours or attitudes:

1. Noticing the event or situation
 2. Interpreting it as a problem
 3. Feeling responsible for addressing it
 4. Taking action to prevent (further) harm
- The golden rule of the active bystander approach is to only intervene in a way that is safe.

There are five main types of active bystander strategies:

- ♣ Distract - create a distraction to interrupt the harmful behaviour and/or offer a victim opportunity to move away.
- ♣ Delegate - engage others with the necessary skills, training, or authority to assist in making an intervention.
- ♣ Direct - challenge the behaviour or attitudes directly.
- ♣ Delayed - offer your support, signpost to support services and reporting routes, and take further action after the incident.
- ♣ Document - make a record of key information to aid with delegating and reporting, and/or to dissuade further harmful behaviour.



Active bystander intervention strategies work in response to behaviours like sexual misconduct, harassment, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and more.